

Carrot

Grow

A carrot is a root vegetable. Carrots were first cultivated 5,000 years ago and most likely originated in Middle Asia near Afghanistan.^{1,2}

All in the Family

Carrots belong to the parsley family. Celery, parsnips, dill and fennel are also members of this family.

Carrots grow well in North Carolina gardens in both spring and fall. Plant one crop in late February, and another in early July. Carrots have feathery green leaves that grow above ground. They are ready to harvest when the top of the carrot begins to pop out of the soil.^{2,3}

Fun Fact: Carrots are called root vegetables because they grow underground as taproots (main root of a plant).^{1,3}

Choose

Color-Me-Carrot

Although carrots are most often thought of as being bright orange, they actually come in a variety of colors!

1. *Cosmic Purple* carrots are bright purple on the outside and yellow on the inside and they taste very sweet.
2. *Atomic Red* carrots are bright red and flavorful.
3. *Snow White* carrots are white in color and very crisp.
4. *Amarillo* carrots are yellow and sweet.³

Carrots are available year round. They grow best in cooler weather. In N.C., carrots can be available from late October to late March and May to June. When selecting carrots, look for ones that are the same color throughout with smooth skin and no cracks. If the stem is attached to the carrot, it should have fresh looking green leaves. Avoid choosing carrots that have become shriveled or limp, are very discolored, have blemishes or soft spots, or are slimy.^{3,4,5}

Fun Fact: On average, Americans eat more than 10 pounds of carrots per person each year!²



Store

Remove leaves, if still attached to carrots. Refrigerate at 32-36°F. Keep bags of carrots sealed until ready to use so they will stay firm and crisp. Store up to 3-4 weeks in the refrigerator. Do not wash carrots until ready to use. Wash under clean, running water. Some fruits and vegetables, such as apples, grapes, peaches, pears, and tomatoes, produce ethylene gas. Carrots develop a bitter taste if stored near these.^{3,4}

Fun Fact: The variety of carrots typically sold is at least 5 inches long and $\frac{3}{4}$ to 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. Baby carrots come from once longer carrots that have been peeled, trimmed and packaged.^{1,4}

Use

Carrots can be purchased fresh (raw), canned, frozen, dried, or juiced. They come in the following forms: whole, halves, quarters, slices (plain or crinkle cut), dices, double slices, strips or shoestrings, chips or cuts. Baby carrots are also an option.⁴

Carrots are often enjoyed raw. Their crisp texture makes for a great, crunchy snack! Raw carrots can be eaten by themselves or on top of a salad. Carrots can be boiled, steamed, sautéed, roasted or grilled. They can also be added to other dishes like casseroles or soups, or baked goods like muffins or cakes.¹

Carrot

Teach

They're A-mazing!

Plant pigments called carotenoids give carrots their orange color and the word "carotenoid" is how they were named. The beta-carotene found in carrots is a member of the carotenoid group. Beta-carotene is used by our bodies to make vitamin A.³

Fun Fact: The most popular carrot in the U.S. is orange, but carrots also grow in purple, red, yellow and white.^{1,2,3}

Class Activity

Materials Needed:

- Multi-colored carrots with leaves intact
- Low basin or bowl (preferably clear)
- Small pebbles
- Water
- Carrot tops (Cut ½ to ¾ inch off the top of the carrot.)
- Carrot seeds
- Potting soil
- Empty, clean quart milk cartons

Steps:

1. Show students the whole carrots. Explain that the part of the carrot we eat grows underground, because it is the root. The leaves of the carrot grow above ground.
2. Put pebbles in the basin or bowl.
3. Place carrot tops on top of the pebbles.
4. Add water up to the level of the carrot.
5. Keep the carrot in a sunny spot and watered well.
6. Have students observe, measure and record growth.
7. Have students label their milk carton with their name.
8. Place soil in each milk carton.
9. Plant seeds in the soil.
10. Keep in the sun and water well.
11. Observe, measure and record growth. Compare to the growth from the carrot top. (Students can take the seedlings home.)

Fun Fact: Dark orange carrots have more beta-carotene.¹

Eat

Seeing 20/20?

Carrots are not just for bunnies. They are a super food for humans! Carrots are low calorie, cholesterol free and low in fat and sodium. One cup of raw carrots strips or slices has about 50 calories and one cup cooked, sliced carrots has about 27 calories. Carrots are an excellent source of beta-carotene, vitamins A and K. They also have vitamins B6 and C, potassium, manganese and fiber. Our bodies can turn beta-carotene into vitamin A. Vitamin A protects us from infection, helps regulate the immune system, supports the growth and health of cells and tissue, and promotes normal vision. Vitamin K helps our body clot blood and make proteins needed for our blood, bones and kidneys. B6 helps our body make protein building blocks (amino acids), turn tryptophan into niacin and serotonin (a brain messenger), and make hemoglobin, insulin, and antibodies to fight infection. Vitamin C aids in healing, protects us from infections and bruising, acts as an antioxidant to prevent cell damage, keeps our gums healthy, helps form collagen to hold muscles, bones and tissues together, and helps our body absorb folate and iron from plants. Potassium helps maintain normal blood pressure, regulate mineral and fluid balance in the body, transmit nerve signals and contract muscles. Manganese plays a role in forming bone and converting carbohydrate, protein and fat into energy. Insoluble fiber aids digestion. Soluble fiber helps lower blood cholesterol.^{1,2,5,6}

Fun Fact: Carrots were purple or orange in Roman times. Dutch growers, in the 16th century, bred carrots to grow in the colors of the House of Orange.¹

Find

For more carrot info and resources, visit:

1. Nebraska Extension, <http://lanaster.unl.edu/nep/fruitveggie.shtml>
2. University of Arizona, <http://cals.arizona.edu>
3. North Carolina State Extension, www.ces.ncsu.edu
4. U.S. Department of Agriculture, Food and Nutrition Service, www.fns.usda.gov
5. Fruits & Veggies More Matters®, www.fruitsveggiesmorematters.org
6. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, www.eatright.org